

ORIGINAL

Governance Practices and the Citizen-Government Relationship (CGR): Psychological Pathways to Political Participation

Prácticas de Gobernanza y la Relación Ciudadano-Gobierno: Mecanismos Psicológicos hacia la Participación Política

M. Fachri Adnan¹ , Hasbullah Malau¹ , Suryanef³ , Al Rafni³ , Afriva Khaidir¹ , Muhammad Afdhal Arrazak¹ , Alfi Husni Fansurya²  

¹Universitas Negeri Padang, Department of Public Administration. Padang. Indonesia.

²Universitas Negeri Padang, Department of Tourism. Padang. Indonesia.

³Universitas Negeri Padang, Department of Social Political Sciences. Padang. Indonesia.

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Corresponding author: Alfi Husni Fansurya 

ABSTRACT

Introduction: democratic engagement is shaped not only by institutional design but also by the quality of everyday interactions between citizens and government. Addressing a gap that often treats governance practices and civic behavior separately, this study models the citizen government relationship as a psychological pathway that links concrete governance practices to empowerment, attitudes, and political participation within Indonesia's decentralized system.

Objective: to determine how five governance practices (administrative simplification, transparency, responsiveness, accountability, and rule of law) shape the citizen government relationship and, through it, political empowerment and participation within Indonesia's decentralized context. We also quantify which practices most strongly predict relationship quality and test whether an individualistic political attitude weakens the link between relationship quality and participation.

Method: a cross sectional survey of 371 adults from 18 provinces used validated Likert scale measures covering governance practices, relationship quality, political empowerment, individualistic orientations, and participation. Partial least squares structural equation modeling was conducted in SmartPLS 4 with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Reliability, convergent and discriminant validity, and model fit met recommended standards.

Results: administrative simplification, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, and accountability each showed significant positive effects on relationship quality. In turn, relationship quality increased political empowerment and produced a positive total effect on participation, including an indirect path through empowerment. More individualistic political attitudes weakened the translation of relationship quality into participation. Among the governance levers, rule of law and simplification exhibited the largest effects, indicating that clear rules and low friction services most strongly build trust and recognition.

Conclusions: governance experiences convert into civic action through relational and psychological mechanisms. Reform priorities should center on rule standardization and service simplification, followed by improvements in responsiveness, accountability, and transparency. By elevating relationship quality and strengthening empowerment, governments can foster broader and more durable forms of citizen participation.

Keywords: Citizen-Government Relationship; Governance Practices; Political Empowerment; Political Participation; Individualistic Political Attitudes.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la participación cívica no depende solo del diseño institucional, sino también de la calidad de la relación cotidiana entre ciudadanía y gobierno. Este estudio propone esa relación como un mecanismo psicológico que enlaza prácticas de gobernanza con empoderamiento, actitudes y participación política en el marco descentralizado de Indonesia.

Objetivo: determinar cómo cinco prácticas de gobernanza (simplificación administrativa, transparencia, capacidad de respuesta, rendición de cuentas y estado de derecho) configuran la relación ciudadano gobierno y, a través de ella, el empoderamiento y la participación política en el contexto descentralizado de Indonesia. Además, cuantificamos qué prácticas predicen con mayor fuerza la calidad relacional y comprobamos si una actitud política individualista debilita el vínculo entre la calidad relacional y la participación.

Método: se aplicó una encuesta transversal a 371 adultos de 18 provincias. Se usaron escalas Likert validadas para prácticas de gobernanza, calidad relacional, empoderamiento político, actitudes individualistas y participación. El análisis se realizó con PLS-SEM en SmartPLS 4 y 5,000 remuestreos bootstrap. Fiabilidad, validez y ajuste cumplieron criterios recomendados.

Resultados: la simplificación administrativa, la transparencia, la capacidad de respuesta, el Estado de derecho y la rendición de cuentas mostraron efectos positivos significativos sobre la calidad de la relación. A su vez, la calidad de la relación incrementó el empoderamiento político y produjo un efecto total positivo sobre la participación, incluyendo una vía indirecta a través del empoderamiento. Actitudes políticas más individualistas debilitaron la traducción de la calidad de la relación en participación. Entre las palancas de gobernanza, el Estado de derecho y la simplificación exhibieron los mayores efectos, lo que indica que reglas claras y servicios con baja fricción son los que más fortalecen la confianza y el reconocimiento.

Conclusiones: las experiencias de gobernanza se convierten en acción cívica mediante mecanismos relacionales y psicológicos. Las prioridades de reforma deben centrarse en la estandarización de normas y la simplificación de servicios, seguidas de mejoras en capacidad de respuesta, rendición de cuentas y transparencia. Al elevar la calidad de la relación y reforzar el empoderamiento, los gobiernos pueden fomentar formas de participación ciudadana más amplias y duraderas.

Palabras clave: Relación Ciudadano-Gobierno; Prácticas de Gobernanza; Empoderamiento Político; Participación Política; Actitudes Políticas Individualistas.

INTRODUCTION

Citizen participation sustains democratic legitimacy and improves government performance, yet participation remains uneven across places and time.^(1,2,3) Classic explanations emphasize individual resources, political socialization, and institutional design. These accounts miss a central engine of inference: everyday service encounters through which citizens judge whether the state is trustworthy, predictable, and fair.^(4,5,6) At service counters, in mobile apps, and via complaint channels, people read cues that aggregate into a citizen-government relationship (CGR). CGR is a relational evaluation adapted from relationship-quality research in psychology and branding, capturing perceived benevolent intent and dependable performance.^(7,8,9) This lens clarifies why tidy administrative reforms do not automatically spur participation. Reforms translate into willingness to act only when experienced as fair, predictable, and dependable.

Using a Good Governance Theory lens, this study explains how five visible governance practices provide cues that shape CGR. Administrative simplification lowers transaction costs.^(10,11,12) Transparency narrows information asymmetries and enables verification.^(13,14) Responsiveness signals attention and agility.^(15,16)

Accountability ensures complaints trigger remedy and corrections.^(17,18) Rule of law provides predictability and equal treatment.^(19,20) When these practices are coherent and present, citizens infer benevolent intent and dependable performance, so each practice should be positively associated with CGR.

CGR functions as both evaluation and mechanism. By signalling relational fairness and dependability, it strengthens psychological empowerment, defined as felt capacity, relevance, and entitlement to influence public processes.^(21,22,23)

A stronger CGR should raise efficacy expectations, reduce mental costs of action, and relate positively to political participation, both directly and through empowerment.

Values condition how relational signals become behaviour. An individualistic political attitude prioritizes autonomy and skepticism toward collective action, which generally depresses participation.^(24,25) More importantly, individualism should attenuate the behavioral return to a good relationship with the state.^(26,27) When CGR is high, individualistic citizens may appreciate competent service yet convert goodwill into action less readily than communally oriented citizens. When CGR is low, individualistic citizens disengage

first. Individualism therefore weakens the positive effect of CGR on participation, and a negative association between CGR and individualism is also plausible.

Indonesia offers a compelling setting. Decentralization and rapid digitalization create wide variation in service quality, institutional capacity, and citizen contact with government across localities, producing heterogeneous cues that shape CGR, empowerment, and participation.^(28,29,30) A focus on relational and psychological mechanisms provides a realistic bridge from administrative reform to civic strengthening.

This investigation maps the mechanisms linking government action, citizen-government relations (CGR), psychological empowerment, and political participation, covering the direct CGR to participation pathway, the indirect pathway through empowerment, and the moderating effect of an individualistic political orientation. Using cross-regional variation in Indonesia during decentralization and the digitalization of public services, the analysis estimates the direction and magnitude of these links to judge whether improvements in CGR coincide with greater empowerment and participation, and whether a more individualistic orientation is associated with lower participation and a weaker CGR to participation link.

METHOD

Design and Setting

This research used a quantitative cross sectional online survey conducted in Indonesia during a single fieldwork window from January 2025 to May 2025, covering respondents from urban and rural areas across major islands, including Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Bali, and Papua.

Population and Sample

The study targeted Indonesian residents aged 17 years or older. Purposive sampling was used with criteria requiring citizenship, residence in Indonesia, attention to government issues within the past six months, and at least one interaction with public services such as civil registration, health, education, taxation, or e government platforms. Individuals active in political parties, campaign teams, or public office were excluded. Cases without consent or failing quality checks were removed. A total of 371 adults completed the survey, exceeding moderate model requirements.

Variables and instruments

Governance was modeled with five latent dimensions administrative simplification, transparency, responsiveness, accountability, and rule of law and examined alongside psychological empowerment and political participation, with political individualism specified as a moderator. Data were obtained via a structured online questionnaire using five-point Likert options. Item sources followed established scales, with wording adapted for clarity and cultural fit while preserving latent meaning, namely governance from Yousaf *et al.*⁽³¹⁾ political individualism from five items adapted from Karpowitz and Patterson and Koestner^(32,33) psychological empowerment from four items adapted from Sasaki⁽³⁴⁾ and political participation from twelve items adapted from Arshad and Khurram⁽³⁵⁾. Validation proceeded through a measurement model workflow that removed indicators with standardized loadings below 0,60 and then confirmed internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity before estimating the structural relations.

Data collection and ethical aspects

Data were collected online under a one token one response rule with screening for speeders, straight lining, and duplicate entries. Participation was voluntary; each respondent reviewed an information sheet, provided electronic informed consent, and all records were de identified with results reported in aggregate.

Data analysis

Analyses used partial least squares structural equation modeling in SmartPLS 4 with two tailed bootstrap inferences based on 5,000 resamples at $\alpha = 0,05$. Reflective measurement was evaluated using standard reliability and validity procedures, problematic indicators were dropped during purification. Item retention decisions and path estimates are reported in the Results section.

RESULTS

The sample comprised 371 respondents with a balanced gender composition, 50,4 % male and 49,6 % female. Age was distributed as follows: 18 to 24 years 19,9 %, 25 to 34 years 38,5 %, 35 to 44 years 25,9 %, and 45 years or older 15,6 %. Most participants resided in urban areas at 63,3 % compared with 36,7 % in rural areas. Educational attainment consisted of high school or equivalent 29,1 %, diploma 15,1 %, bachelor's degree 44,2 %, and master's degree or higher 11,6 % (table 1).

Table 1. Sample characteristics (N=371)			
Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	187	50,40
	Female	184	49,60
Age	18-24	74	19,95
	25-34	143	38,54
	35-44	96	25,88
	≥45	58	15,63
Domicile	Urban	235	63,34
	Rural	136	36,66
Education	High school or equiv.	108	29,11
	Diploma	56	15,09
	Bachelor's	164	44,20
	Master's or higher	43	11,60

Measurement Model

After purification, two items from Responsiveness (RSP) and three items from Political Participation (OPP) were removed due to low loadings ($< 0,60$). The retained indicators loaded between 0,653 and 0,892 (table 2). Collinearity was not a concern. All VIF values ranged from 1,257 to 2,256, which are well below recommended cutoffs.

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity Statistics							
Variable	Item	Loading	VIF	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_a	rho_c	AVE
Accountability	Ac1	0,730	1,375	0,769	0,783	0,851	0,588
	Ac2	0,737	1,568				
	Ac3	0,824	1,638				
	Ac4	0,772	1,435				
Individualism	Individ1	0,713	1,295	0,713	0,729	0,820	0,533
	Individ2	0,716	1,384				
	Individ3	0,714	1,419				
	Individ4	0,776	1,283				
Political Participation	OPP10	0,745	1,733	0,880	0,884	0,903	0,509
	OPP11	0,705	1,668				
	OPP12	0,679	1,620				
	OPP2	0,679	1,532				
	OPP3	0,746	1,796				
	OPP6	0,723	1,669				
	OPP7	0,723	1,644				
	OPP8	0,721	1,722				
Political Empowerment	OPP9	0,696	1,684	0,726	0,729	0,829	0,548
	PE1	0,756	1,402				
	PE2	0,699	1,359				
	PE3	0,776	1,535				
Citizen-Government Relation (CGR)	PE4	0,727	1,257	0,843	0,844	0,906	0,762
	CGR1	0,892	2,256				
	CGR2	0,848	1,815				
	CGR3	0,877	2,105				
Responsiveness	RSP2	0,704	1,525	0,814	0,832	0,863	0,512
	RSP3	0,698	1,608				
	RSP5	0,698	1,608				
	RSP6	0,703	1,542				
	RSP7	0,773	1,506				
	RSP8	0,715	1,407				

Rule of Law	RoL1	0,769	1,761				
	RoL2	0,720	1,744				
	RoL3	0,709	1,697				
	RoL4	0,736	1,783				
	RoL5	0,742	1,713	0,888	0,906	0,907	0,522
	RoL6	0,742	1,798				
	RoL7	0,777	1,821				
	RoL8	0,739	1,671				
	RoL9	0,655	1,679				
Simplify of Administration	SA1	0,774	1,770				
	SA2	0,669	1,274				
	SA3	0,773	1,933				
	SA4	0,769	1,932	0,849	0,861	0,882	0,519
	SA5	0,792	1,494				
	SA6	0,789	1,980				
	SA7	0,653	1,426				
Transparency	TP1	0,779	1,507				
	TP2	0,874	1,684	0,725	0,745	0,845	0,646
	TP3	0,754	1,307				

This indicates the absence of problematic multicollinearity and suggests no detectable bias from collinearity or common-method variance in the full collinearity sense.^(36,37) Internal consistency was adequate, with Cronbach's alpha between 0,713 and 0,888 and composite reliability between 0,820 and 0,907. Convergent validity was supported (AVE = 0,509 to 0,762). Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of AVE for each construct exceeded its inter-construct correlations (table 3).

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Analysis of Discriminant Validity									
	SA	Indv	OPP	PE	CGR	RSP	RoL	AC	TP
SA	0,767								
Indv	0,221	0,730							
OPP	-0,189	-0,081	0,714						
PE	-0,140	-0,159	0,351	0,740					
CGR	0,233	0,061	0,168	0,131	0,873				
RSP	-0,072	-0,086	0,130	0,022	0,168	0,716			
RoL	0,150	0,101	-0,140	0,026	0,261	-0,036	0,722		
AC	0,099	0,025	-0,094	-0,146	0,260	0,016	0,050	0,720	
TP	0,084	0,065	0,001	-0,078	0,177	-0,099	-0,002	0,052	0,804

Inner Model Assessment

The governance practices showed positive and significant associations with Citizen-Government Relationship (CGR): Simplification of Administration (SA) $B = 0,219$, $t = 5,388$, $p < 0,001$; Transparency (TP) $B = 0,171$, $t = 3,388$, $p = 0,001$; Responsiveness (RSP) $B = 0,203$, $t = 5,082$, $p < 0,001$; Accountability (AC) $B = 0,176$, $t = 3,971$, $p < 0,001$; and Rule of Law (RoL) $B = 0,232$, $t = 5,350$, $p < 0,001$ (table 3).

Consistent with the conceptual model, CGR positively predicted Political Empowerment (PE) ($B = 0,131$, $t = 2,318$, $p = 0,020$) and OPP ($B = 0,166$, $t = 3,099$, $p = 0,002$). PE also positively predicted OPP ($B = 0,283$, $t = 5,376$, $p < 0,001$). By contrast, the direct path from CGR to Individualism was not significant ($B = 0,083$, $t = 1,356$, $p = 0,175$), and the path from Individualism to OPP was likewise not significant ($B = -0,014$, $t = 0,248$, $p = 0,804$) (table 4).

The interaction term indicated a significant negative moderation of Individualism on the CGR $\rightarrow$ OPP relationship ($B = -0,248$, $t = 4,490$, $p < 0,001$). This implies that the positive effect of CGR on political participation weakens as individualism increases (table 4 and figure 1).

Path	Original Sample (β)	t-statistic	p-value
Simplification of Administration → Citizen-Government Relationship	0,219	5,388	0,000
Transparency → Citizen-Government Relationship	0,171	3,388	0,001
Responsiveness → Citizen-Government Relationship	0,203	5,082	0,000
Accountability → Citizen-Government Relationship	0,176	3,971	0,000
Rule of Law → Citizen-Government Relationship	0,232	5,350	0,000
Citizen-Government Relationship → Political Empowerment	0,131	2,318	0,020
Citizen-Government Relationship → Political Participation	0,166	3,099	0,002
Political Empowerment → Political Participation	0,283	5,376	0,000
Citizen-Government Relationship → Individualism	0,083	1,356	0,175
Individualism → Political Participation	-0,014	0,248	0,804
Individualism × Citizen-Government Relationship → Political Participation	-0,248	4,490	0,000

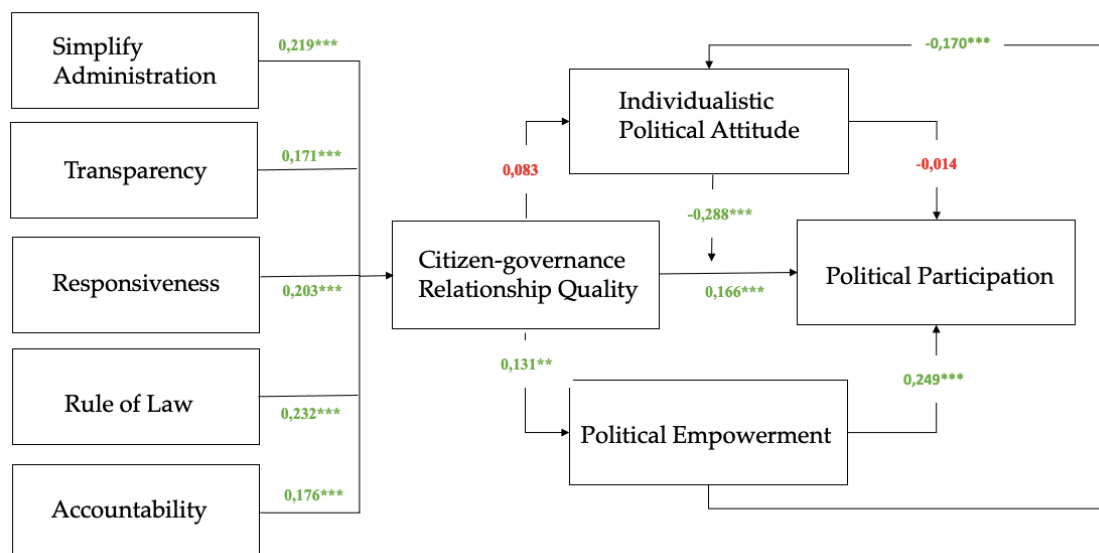


Figure 1. Structural Model Result

DISCUSSION

Theoretical contributions

First, the findings clarify a psychological pathway linking governance practices to political participation through the perceived quality of the citizen-government relationship and political empowerment. This aligns with relational theory and extends it by showing that relationship quality is not only an attitudinal outcome but also a conduit to action.^(38,39)

Second, the positive effects of simplification, transparency, responsiveness, accountability, and rule of law on relationship quality indicate that these practices operate as relational signals rather than isolated administrative routines. The pattern strengthens construct validity around citizen-government relationship as a higher order driver of empowerment and participation.

Third, the negative moderation by individualism identifies a boundary condition. The link between relationship quality and participation is stronger in lower individualism contexts. This helps reconcile mixed evidence in the participation literature by showing when and for whom relational investments pay off.^(40,41)

Finally, the non-significant direct paths from relationship quality to individualism and from individualism to participation suggest that cultural orientation shapes how relational cues translate into action, not the propensity to act per se. This distinction invites a more precise use of culture as a moderator rather than a universal main effect.

Practical implications

Local governments can translate these findings into a focused service playbook that is measurable within one or two quarters. Begin by simplifying the highest volume citizen journeys, remove unnecessary steps, and publish updated checklists online. Pair this with a transparency routine that citizens can actually use by releasing monthly dashboards on service volumes, turnaround times, and complaint resolution, each accompanied by a short plain-language summary and a one page FAQ. Close the loop on responsiveness by setting a first response standard such as within 24 hours, acknowledging every complaint automatically, and assigning a named case owner so residents know who is accountable.

Frontline accountability should be made visible and auditable. Display service charters at offices with clear redress options when standards are missed, and run quarterly audits that include citizen observers with all corrective actions published. Reinforce rule of law in everyday decisions by standardizing eligibility and documentation rules across branches, then run random checks to ensure consistent application. Provide short scenario based training to curb discretionary drift and reduce variability in outcomes.

Participation rises when empowerment is activated rather than merely informed. Create micro participation channels that are tied to live service problems, for example a small participatory budgeting ballot each quarter, a citizen jury for one policy area, or a co design session that ships a prototype within a month. Track empowerment items alongside participation counts and review both in monthly management meetings. Treat relationship quality and empowerment as leading indicators and link them to unit level targets so teams are rewarded for moving precursors to participation, not only the final turnout numbers.

Programs should also be segmented by cultural orientation to capture the moderation pattern in the data. In segments with higher individualism, emphasize personal benefits, convenience, and low effort paths to act, such as quick digital polls and opt in votes that take seconds. In segments with lower individualism, emphasize community benefits, mutual accountability, and shared rituals, such as neighborhood forums and group pledges. By tailoring the same relational signals to different audiences, agencies can convert improvements in the citizen-government relationship into participation gains more efficiently.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that core governance practices, namely simplification of administration, transparency, responsiveness, accountability, and rule of law, strengthen the citizen-government relationship, which in turn enhances political empowerment and participation. The moderation test indicates that this pathway weakens as individualism rises, clarifying when relational investments translate into action. The measurement model meets accepted reliability and validity thresholds, and low VIF values indicate that the estimates are not distorted by harmful multicollinearity.

The findings advance theory by positioning relationship quality as a conduit between administrative practice and political behavior, rather than a terminal attitude. They also yield a practical playbook: streamline high volume services, publish usable performance dashboards, close the responsiveness loop with clear service standards, make accountability visible at the frontline, apply rules consistently, create micro participation channels that build empowerment, and tailor outreach to cultural orientation. While the cross-sectional design limits causal inference and external validity should be tested across regions and groups, the overall pattern suggests that targeted improvements in everyday governance can produce measurable gains in empowerment and participation within normal management cycles.

This study involved participants whose participation was voluntary and uncompensated because of financial constraints, which may bias the sample toward individuals who are more civically motivated than the broader population. To mitigate this concern, we compared the sample profile with population benchmarks and implemented post-stratification weights. The instrument relies on established measures; however, we conducted only basic tests of measurement invariance, so generalizations across regions and demographic groups should be interpreted with caution. Our findings are associative rather than causal. Future work employing panel designs or field studies that vary relational signals in real service encounters and track outcomes over time is needed to strengthen causal claims. Beyond individualism, cultural dimensions such as power distance, collectivism, and social trust are likely to condition effect sizes and constitute a promising agenda for subsequent research.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: M. Fachri Adnan, Hasbullah Malau, Afriva Khaidir.

Data curation: Muhammad Afdhal Arrazak, Alfi Husni Fansurya.

Formal analysis: Hasbullah Malau, Al Rafni.

Research: M. Fachri Adnan, Suryanef, Muhammad Afdhal Arrazak.

Methodology: Hasbullah Malau, Afriva Khaidir, Al Rafni.

Project management: M. Fachri Adnan, Suryanef.

Resources: Afriva Khaidir, Suryanef.

Software: Alfi Husni Fansurya, Muhammad Afdhal Arrazak.

Supervision: Suryanef, Al Rafni.

Validation: Hasbullah Malau, Afriva Khaidir.

Display: Alfi Husni Fansurya, Muhammad Afdhal Arrazak.

Drafting - original draft: M. Fachri Adnan, Hasbullah Malau, Alfi Husni Fansurya.

Writing - proofreading and editing: Suryanef, Al Rafni, Afriva Khaidir.